

"Young man!" the detective bellowed fiercely. "Answer me—yes or no—did you enter this house between the hours of twelve and three o'clock this morning?"

Harrington sprang to his feet in anger. "For some time I have been aware of your motive and I tell you I have nothing further to say. Instead of altering your opinion of my guilt—denials from me would only be a waste of words and time."

"You refuse to answer?"

"I do."

"And you realize your refusal compels me to place you under arrest?"

Harrington heard a little cry of agony, and, turning quickly about, he cautioned Helen, who was seemingly about to speak, then stepping to the fireplace he pulled a letter from his breast pocket, and, with a lightning movement, threw it among the burning logs.

Mooney sprang to his feet, but either the threatening young giant standing guard over the fireplace, or the uselessness of trying to recover the burning paper, suddenly caused a change of mind, and instantly he resumed his former position. Thus the note Helen had written the night before was destroyed.

Mr. Winslow, who had been staring into space, apparently unable to comprehend or unwilling to believe his own ears, was suddenly galvanized into a sort of superficial life, with the movement. A bitter smile fluttered across his face and the detective's accusation found room in his eyes, and when he spoke the words fell from his mouth with adamant severity. "So—you are the man who has dared to speak to me of honor—you hypocrite!"

Harrington flinched under the epithet; hot blood rushed to his face and he struggled fiercely to retain himself. Helen, too, heard the words; her eyes fairly danced with indignation, her delicate fingers curled till every nail pressed deep into the soft palm, and she burst into the room.

Jack sprang forward and met her half way. Again he tried to prevail upon her. "For God's sake—don't!" he implored.

She looked at him, then at her father, and stood irresolute. They were near the door leading into the study, and as Helen became conscious of it her eyes gave a leap, she placed a hand on his arm and whispered earnestly: "To silence a woman one must yield to her wishes."

"What would you have me do?"

"Fly into that room—slam the door after you—run upstairs and into Tom's room, but first throw open the window in there—it will lead them to believe you jumped through it."

Harrington listened in amazement, still he knew Helen would not be silent an instant after she had his refusal, her flashing eyes gave evidence of that, and he wavered reluctantly. "But Helen—it would only deter the thing—a few hours, perhaps," he argued weakly, and furtively glanced at his accuser, but the detective seemed in no hurry.

The suspect's calm resignation after his stubborn demeanor during the inquisition had frozen Mooney's wrath. Somehow he was beginning to feel less sure of his man, and while the young couple conversed so earnestly he sank back in the soft leather, taking advantage of the time with rapid thinking. Nothing escaped his shrewd, invisible eyes, even his body shifted a trifle, then a strange light flashed across his face and he gripped tightly the arms of the chair.

Helen glanced quickly about the room and her eyes settled upon the man at her side. She wondered at his composure and was sure he was the strongest, most forcible man on earth and yet the most gentle; the hardest to manage and yet manageable; she realized now more than ever how much she loved him, and trembled.

"You must—you must go—or I'll die," she cried pitifully. "They shall not have you—you shall not submit to it. Oh, Jack! think of your name—your business—please go."

The last two words were scarcely audible, but their pathos thrilled his heart. Care and trouble had not counted in the environments surrounding Harrington's life, and the unaccustomed anxiety of the past two days was beginning to tell—his nerves were strained to the breaking point. Glancing at the men who would deprive him his liberty a cold chill crept unpleasantly up and down his spine, then he looked at the frail girl standing ready to rob them of the prize. He smiled faintly, drew a deep breath and threw back his head. "Between the devil and the deep blue sea," he murmured, and before the astonished detectives could prevent it, he was gone.

Milford sprang after him with an oath, but the girl barred the door with outstretched arms and head thrown back; her eyes blazed defiance. "Don't you dare touch me," she cried.

The detective who would have forced his way past her stopped short at the warning. At that instant the window in the next room was thrown open, he heard it and, fearing his man would gain too much time, turned and rapidly left the house by another exit.

Mooney had risen. It became his duty to remind the spirited young lady of her offence—her serious offence; interfering with the duties of an officer,

He did so—tried to speak gravely, but the words rang superficially weak in his ears, while his heart applauded her bravery, and knew a smile played on his countenance at the absurdity of the charge.

Miss Winslow turned upon him. "I know I am interfering with your persecution of an innocent man, and I know you shall not take him away while I can prevent it. It is you who must be reminded of the terrible wrong—you who have decided upon a man's guilt because of a flimsy circumstance—despite the multiplicity of shameful blots cast upon the records of justice in this same manner—coupled with the mental torture of your victims."

Pausing an instant, her eyes swept past the detective and obviously ignored his presence. Her bosom rose and fell rapidly, while the very oppressiveness of the room whipped her passion into fury and she continued distractedly: "Father, do you think there is no limit to my endurance—can you not realize my heart is breaking? Must I in turn follow my noble brother whom you have cast aside because he has displeased you—because he has dared marry the woman he loves? Must I stand alone in defence of the man whose wife I hope to become? Are you not satisfied with having tried to ruin him in the business you urged him to follow—must you also drag his name in the mire by permitting these men to weave a net of evidence around him—so convincing that all the world shall pronounce him guilty of a crime he did not commit?"

The great financier listened in a dazed sort of way to his daughter—his little girl—who had suddenly grown to womanhood, and as each pas-



She listened almost without breathing

sionate word sank deep into his soul he was only conscious of being confronted by a beautiful, defiant woman, who appeared majestic as only a woman can when she places herself between impending danger and the one she loves.

With each quivering, pulsing wave of emotion deeper and deeper grew the lines of pain in his white face. When the echo of her voice died upon his ears he tried to speak, his lips moved, yet no word emanated from them, and with a groan of anguish, his head sank onto his breast.

Instantly, and with the wonderful inconsistency of her sex, Helen again became the gentle, sympathetic girl. Springing forward she threw her arms about his neck and sank to her knees at his side.

"Daddy! Daddy! Forgive me—I didn't mean to hurt you so—Oh! what have I done—what have I said!" Her strength gave away, a heart-rendering sob convulsed her and grateful tears sprang into her burning eyes.

Slowly her father raised his head; years were heaped upon him during these few agonizing moments, though his face was strangely soft. Placing a hand on her head he caressed her tenderly, soothingly.

Mooney blinked his eyes and swallowed hard against the rising lump in his throat, though indurated by his profession and contact with all sorts of people, and deplored the moment this case had been assigned to him.

Mr. Winslow assisted Helen to her feet and almost fervently he kissed her on the forehead; then turning toward the detective he straightened perceptibly, yet spoke with quivering voice: "We have made a grave mistake. The man does not live who could be guilty of any crime and be loved by such a woman." He walked from the room as quietly and decisively as he had spoken.

Helen waited until he was no longer within range of her voice. "And you?" she asked eagerly of the detective.

"I confess—Miss—you have made a great impression upon me, too."

"Impression!" she repeated scornfully. "What a grand thing it must seem, to defend—as you think—I have done—a thief."

"No—you misunderstand me. I was not thinking of his innocence or guilt when answering you—only your faith in him which has suggested a good deal to my mind. But would you have me drop the case?" he asked, suddenly, and the piercing glance he cast upon her seemed to drill its way into her soul.

"No," came the firm reply. "Not until doomsday if needs be—not until you have cleared Mr. Harrington's name of the blot you have cast upon it."

Mooney smiled. The question was but "me of the suggestions her attitude had conveyed," him, and with her answer things began to take definite shape in his mind. "The impression is growing stronger," he said affably. "Miss Winslow," he continued, and in his voice there was a tinge of bitterness. "I venture to say, at some time during the life of every man and many women, we detectives are cursed for the things we do—or censured for those we fail to do, and at this minute I fancy you are in the latter class, thinking me a blockhead and so forth." He glanced up and smiled, but his listener remained silent. "Sometimes I wonder if the laity ever stop to consider how we are forced to grovel about in the dark, grasping at straws like drowning men, often desperately snatching at things to which there isn't substance enough to hang—and we fail. I admit we make mistakes in little things, but in the long run we are very sure of ourselves."

"Then you admit your error?"

"Not altogether. Harrington did come here last night—he again became the case-hardened detective—and you knew he was coming."

Miss Winslow became suddenly rigid. "How do you know that?" she gasped.

"I didn't until this minute, but it is all I need to know—the rest is easy, though had you told me at first, it would have spared you unnecessary pain." He resorted to an old trick that had served him well; the rest was not easy, its intricacy was maddening, but to hide the lie he spoke slowly, convincingly, though with an air of solicitude to draw her out. He was positive that whatever Harrington had done the night before—she knew and he must find out. "I'm sorry—very sorry, but, of course, there was a reason for your silence and it is the one thing I cannot grasp."

Helen's frigid demeanor slowly gave way until finally she began to wonder at the cleverness of the man and stared for some seconds in utter amazement.

"Father's anger," she breathed dreamily.

"Why, yes—of course—stupid of me!" exclaimed Mooney, and to himself, said, "At last." Then aloud, he continued: "Miss Winslow—I have a number of very trying questions to ask and I hope you will pardon me for saying you look too worn and worried to be tortured with any more of this. Will you please tell Mr. Harrington I would like very much to confer with him?"

She lurched forward and clutched at a corner of the massive library table, and leaned toward him, breathing hard. "What leads you to believe I know where he is?" she managed to ask.

"Your eyes are so expressive," he replied smilingly. "When you were directing his get-away I watched you—saw your glance shoot upward and when he sprang from the room I knew you had told him to go upstairs."

"Gracious! I believe you are a wizard. You say you know what has happened—have I your word of honor that you sincerely believe it?"

"You have," he replied promptly.

"Then wait," and joyfully she ran from the room.

Light was breaking into the darkness. Mooney dropped into a chair and began a rapid review of events in the case as they now stood, dividing them into two sets. Harrington—Miss Winslow—and the necklace. A pair of crooks—a dynamited safe—and a clean job. But best of all—back to the original theory and a damnably clever criminal. "Did Harrington come before or after the robbery—what the devil kept him out until three o'clock—and how did the necklace get back to the safe?" he mused aloud, unconscious of another's presence, who having walked into the room a second before, stood by and overheard his pondering.

"Perhaps I can enlighten you."

He straightened at the words and looked up sharply at the speaker. "That is why I sent for you," he replied.

"Am I to understand that you have hit upon a likely clue—or I should say—dropped an unlikely one?" asked the other.

"Mr. Harrington—I'm not inclined to be a talkative man, nor am I offering apology. What has happened—has happened, and to tell the truth I'm glad of it. Later, you may or you may not understand why, but for the present try to be satisfied

(Continued on page 12)